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Bernard Mandeville and the "Judicious Reader"

[Bernard Mandeville e o "Leitor Criterioso"]

Sylvie Kleiman-Lafon*

Abstract: Ever since the publication of the *Fable of the Bees* and its formulaic equation of private vices with public benefits, Mandeville has generally been regarded as an author who revelled in paradox; a master of irony and sarcasm. Whether he really meant to give free rein to private vices – the "laissez faire" of unbridled capitalism –, whether he did think that the poor should not be given access to education, or that prostitution should be institutionalised, is still a matter of discussion. If Mandeville's provocative use of paradoxes has been the object of ample academic scrutiny, the author-reader relationship that results from this paradoxical mode of writing has generally been overlooked. In the present article, I wish to show that Mandeville is less interested in convincing the readers of the validity of his moral – or immoral – stances (whatever they may be) than in guiding them through the uncertain and disconcerting maze of critical thinking and self-knowledge.
Keywords: Reader-Response. Authorship. Critical Thinking. Self-Knowledge. Indeterminacy. Paradox.

Resumo: Desde a publicação da *Fábula das abelhas* e sua fórmula vícios privados com benefícios públicos, Mandeville tem sido geralmente considerado como um autor que se deleitava com paradoxos, um mestre da ironia e do sarcasmo. Se ele realmente pretendia soltar as rédeas dos vícios privados – o "laissez faire" do capitalismo desenfreado –, se ele pensava que os pobres não deveriam ter acesso à educação, ou que a prostituição deveria ser institucionalizada, ainda é um assunto de discussão. Se o uso provocador dos paradoxos de Mandeville foi objeto de amplo escrutínio acadêmico, a relação autor-leitor que resulta desse modo de escrita paradoxal tem sido geralmente negligenciada. No presente artigo, desejo mostrar que Mandeville está menos interessado em convencer os leitores da validade de suas posturas morais – ou imorais – do que em guiá-los através do labirinto incerto e desconcertante do pensamento crítico e do autoconhecimento.
Palavras-chave: Leitor-Resposta. Interpretação. Pensamento Crítico. Autoconhecimento. Indeterminação. Paradoxo.

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> "A simple reader would take a Paradox either for Felony, or some other heinous crime, or else for some ridiculous turpitude; whereas perhaps a judicious Reader knows what the word signifies. And that a Paradox is an opinion not yet generally received."
> (HOBBES, 1656, p. 239)

Confronted with Swift's *Modest Proposal* and Mandeville's "Essay on Charity and Charity Schools", students of literature are usually quick to identify the underlying irony of the Swiftian text but are much more confused when it comes to the real nature Mandeville's infamous essay. The horrific idea of selling young children to "persons of quality and fortune" for them to be "Stewed, Roasted, Baked, Boyled" or served "in a Fricasse or a Ragout" (SWIFT, 1729, pp. 6-7) certainly seems outrageous enough to exclude any literal reading, despite the factual computation that sustains the narrator's arguments. As Elizabeth Hedrick has shown, Swift's cannibalistic proposal cannot be taken seriously although his "hostility to the poor," whom he considered at least partially responsible for their plight, was strong enough to transpire in some of his other works (HEDRICK, 2017, pp. 855-57).[1] The interpretation of Mandeville's essay, however, is not a straight-forward affair, and the students who are asked to compare both texts are usually divided when it comes to deciding whether Mandeville *really* considered that teaching the poor how to read and write was a surer way to "promote idleness" and turn them away from work than keeping them in "the grossest ignorance and stupidity". Did Mandeville think that "To make the Society happy and People easy under the meanest Circumstances, it is requisite that great Numbers of them should be Ignorant as well as Poor"? (MANDEVILLE, 1924, II, p. 288) If he really meant what he wrote, was he not indeed – as he jocularly said so himself – "endeavouring by Instigation of the Prince of Darkness, to introduce into these Realms greater Ignorance and Barbarity than ever Nation was plunged into by *Goths* and *Vandals* since the Light of the Gospel first appeared in the World"? (MANDEVILLE, 1924, II, p. 290-91) Bernard Mandeville leaves it "to the judicious reader" (MANDEVILLE, 1924, II, p. 290-91) to decide. Philip Pinkus argues that Swift and Mandeville both present their readers with a bare description of the world as it is, but that while Swift provides his readers with a moral judgment, Mandeville "leaves such moral questions for the reader to answer." (PINKUS, 1975,

[1] For a detailed analysis of Swift's *Modest Proposal*, see PHIDDIAN (1996).

p. 193) Unlike Swift's proposal – the content of which, once revealed, is no longer ambivalent for the readers –, Mandeville's essay on charity schools seems to remain to this day "the most puzzling of his works" (PONGIGLIONE & TOLONEN, 2016, p. 83), no matter how many times the perplexed readers go back to it and ponder over its content.

The aim of the present article is not to give yet another interpretation of Mandeville's "Essay on Charity and Charity Schools" or indeed of any of Mandeville's works,[2] nor is it to delve once again into the much explored "paradoxical" nature of Mandeville's prose, but to try and understand the textual relation Mandeville carefully constructs with his readers.[3] Alessandro Chiessi fittingly underlines the fact that scholars who have explored the literary genres practised by Mandeville have mostly limited themselves to *The Fables of the Bees*. However, while he acknowledges the fact that Mandeville "tested a lot of genres, experimenting unusual stylistic approaches," he seems to dismiss those literary endeavours, concluding that the philosopher "sometimes achieved dull results" (CHIESSI, 2015, p. 67), without being more specific. I wish to show that by leaving the readers to draw their own conclusions from what he describes as a "Rhapsody void of Order or Method" (MANDEVILLE, 1924, I, p. 405), the main goal of the Dutch philosopher is not to persuade the readers to reach any specific and obvious conclusion but to – hopefully – give them the conceptual apparatus necessary to autonomous critical thinking. To achieve this, Mandeville relies on the typical literary devices used by some early-modern writers of comic fiction to involve the readers in the creative process. This involvement goes beyond the mere amusement provided by Mandeville's textual rhapsody, but unlike Swift who, according to Leavis, resorts to irony and satire so as to "defeat habit, to intimidate and to demoralize" his readers (LEAVIS, 1970, p. 85) and not necessarily to lead them to uncover meaning, Mandeville never intends "to induce a trust in the solid ground before opening the pitfall" (LEAVIS, 1970, p. 89); he gives the readers tools to navigate uncertain, shifting waters – whether they use them or not (and use them correctly) is another question. Mandeville's works are no doubt paradoxical, and the undecidedness in which he leaves the readers could probably be seen as a form of mind-game played at their expense, as Richard Rodino and others have sugges-

[2]For more on this particular topic, see for instance Pongiglione and Tolonen (2016) and Uphaus (1979), p. 40–43, although I fail to be convinced by Uphaus, who compares Mandeville's essay with Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*. Stephen Bygrave also analyses Mandeville's essay and its reception: see Bygrave (2009).

[3]On Mandeville's paradoxes, see for instance Balsemão Pires and Braga (2015); Schneider (1987); Pinkus (1975).

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ted.[4] I will endeavour to show that he is using literature to set the readers onto the path of reason and self-knowledge and not to reveal and impose auctorial truth.

Auctorial guise

Béatrice Guion has stressed the importance of literary models for Mandeville, who started his literary career as a translator / imitator of Scarron's burlesque *Typhon* and of La Fontaine's fables – translations abounding in Hudibrastic influences – before writing his own fables, including *The Grumbling Hive*, later enriched with remarks inspired by Bayle's *Dictionary* and with philosophical dialogues "with a revendicated French patronage" (GUION, 2015, p. 91). This, however, may give the false impression that Mandeville, a native speaker of Dutch and a physician who settled in England in the last decade of the seventeenth century, was then trying a hesitant hand at an unfamiliar medium (literature) in a still unfamiliar language (English) and needed this literary tutelage, refining his writing skills over thirty years of literary creations. If translations may have been a way for Mandeville to become more self-assured as a writer, his wide-ranging literary experiments have always been those of a consummate man of letters, not the jejune stylistic rambles of an amateur. Mandeville did not consider literature (poetry, prose, dialogue, satire, parody) as a stepping-stone towards more serious philosophical pursuits, but as a desirable way of circulating his ideas.

Mandeville addressed his readers for the first time in the preface to his translations of a selection of La Fontaine's fables (MANDEVILLE, 1703), which was also his second appearance as an – anonymous – author (the first being a political poem entitled *The Pamphleteers*, published a few weeks before). This "preface to the reader" – about the inconvenience of having to write prefaces – is proof enough of Mandeville's grasp of literary tropes,[5] as he anticipates what Shaftesbury would write a few years later about those mandatory textual appendages:

[4] See Rodino (1982); Fish (1972).

[5] Mandeville may have been inspired by the satirical preface to *Francion*, the translation of which had just been published by Wellington, his publisher at the time. For more on Charles Sorel's satirical preface, see Mallinson (1990). Although it would be hard to prove, I am convinced that Mandeville was among the "several hands" involved in this translation of *Francion*.

> This is the *Coquetry* of a modern Author; whose Epistles Dedicatory, Prefaces, and Addresses to the *Reader*, are so many affected Graces, design'd to draw the Attention from the Subject, toward *Himself*; and make it be generally observed, not so much *what he says*, *as what he is*, and what Figure he already makes or hope to make in the fashionable World. (SHAFTESBURY, 1710, p. 48)

Mandeville describes the whole exercise as a merely commercial supplement imposed by the publisher to a reluctant author, but he also uses it as an opportunity to drag the reader, from the start, into a rather unbalanced and perplexing relation: "it is hard I should be compelled to talk to my Reader, whether I have any thing to say to him or not" (MANDEVILLE, 1703, np.). The preface to *The Virgin Unmask'd* is written in the same vein, and lambasts the lies with which other writers usually lace their prefaces: "they'll protest they have no other Aim than the Reader's Good, which commonly is an abominable Lie". (MANDEVILLE, 1709, np.)

Despite this rather inauspicious start, Mandeville will never cease to talk to his readers either directly, (supposedly) as Bernard Mandeville – or rather as the self-conscious narratorial "I" – or indirectly through one of his many fictional incarnations.[6] But his early prefaces are also a first test for the readers, who have to decide whether or not to trust Mandeville's pledge of honesty when he confesses his disgust for prefaces that he considers "full of Hypocrisie and Dissimulation," and promises to be very different from those who "write for profit, or for glory" while falsely claiming they aim at "the Reader's Good" (MANDEVILLE, 1709, np). In the dedicatory epistle to his translation of Scarron's *Typhon, ou la Gigantomanie*, in which he recommends the work to hypothetical readers collectively described as a "society of F—ls," Mandeville reminds the "Lavish Benefactors of Whimsical Inventions" the true "end of Dedication" for poets and painters: "whilst one flatters your Qualities, and the other your Features, however Drawing your Picture may be the pretence, Drawing your Purse is the aim" (MANDEVILLE, 1704, np.). The first uncertainty for the reader appears thus in these jocular peritexts. Should the reader put himself in the hands of an author who, mocking the false disinterestedness of those who

[6]Wayne Booth defines the self-conscious narrator as one who "intrudes into his novel to comment on himself as a writer, and on his book, not simply as a series of events with moral implications, but as a created literary product" (BOOTH, 1952, p. 165). Much like the narrator of Don Quixote, self-conscious narrators usually appear as early as the preface and directly address the readers. Closer to Mandeville, and one highly possible literary influence for him, Booth mentions Sorel's *Francion* (in which the self-conscious narrator only appears in the peritext) and Scarron's *Roman Comique*.

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write prefaces or dedications, writes prefaces and dedications himself? And should he trust an author who, after declaring "I hate formality, good Reader" (MANDEVILLE, 1703, np.), pays so much attention to form and to the way he presents himself to those who happen to open his books? And who exactly is the speaking voice addressing the reader?

Mandeville did not sign his first two publications and his subsequent approach to authorship has always been complex and wavering. He signed the dedication of *Typhon* with his initials, B.M., at a time when he was still unknown to the public, but did not sign the preface. His name and title – B. Mandeville, M.D. – first appeared on the title-page of the second, enlarged edition of his translation of La Fontaine, *Æsop Dress'd* (1704). Neither of the two issues of *The Grumbling Hive* (both printed in 1705) are signed, but Mandeville returns to the initials in the preface to the first edition of *The Virgin Unmask'd* (1709), for his collection of poems and further translations of Scarron, *Wishes to a Godson* (1712), and for the first edition of *Free Thoughts on Religion* (1720). All editions of the *Fable of the Bees* are anonymous, but the second edition of *Free Thoughts on religion* (1723) bears the indication "By the Author of the *Fable of the Bees*," on the title-page, and so does the second edition of *The Virgin Unmask'd* (1724), the title-page of which uncovers the full identity of its author: "By Bernard Mandeville, Author of the *Fable of the Bees*." On two other occasions – in the various editions of his *Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Diseases* and on the title-page of his *Enquiry into the Causes of the Frequent Executions at Tyburn* – Mandeville appears in his capacity as a physician: "B. Mandeville, M.D.". Irwin Primer has underlined the importance of auctorial identity for Mandeville: "His status as an author remains ambivalent. Indeed, when we have finished his last sentence and return to his title page, we are again reminded that the "author" of this work is 'B.M.,' a writer for whom hiding his identity may have been as important as asserting and revealing his thoughts." (MANDEVILLE, 2017, xxii).

Whether or not Mandeville is "asserting and revealing his thoughts," the question remains as to who exactly addresses the reader in his works. More often than not, it is neither the author himself, nor an ambivalent "I," but an intriguing collection of voices that may or may not reflect Mandeville's opinions or, for that matter, the reader's. Interestingly, for Shaftesbury the dialogue form was the surest way to dissolve or obliterate both reader and writer: "Much more is this the case in *Dialogue*. For here the *Author* is annihilated; and the *Reader* being no way apply'd to, stands for Nobody. The self-interesting Partys both

vanish at once." (SHAFTESBURY, 1710, p. 49). Mandeville offers his own version of this obliteration by shifting from one incarnation to another, speaking with many voices at once, sometimes using words and arguments that could be those of his readers, and contradicting himself in the process. In the preface to *The Virgin Unmask'd* – a dialogue between Lucinda and her niece Antonia over the value of marriage – Mandeville is conspicuously eager to convince the reader that Lucinda, who has studied medicine like him,[7] does not represent his ideas but her own: "Therefore, tho' Lucinda speaks altogether against Matrimony, don't think that I do so too." (MANDEVILLE, 1709, np.) When the first edition of *The Virgin Unmask'd* was published, Mandeville was contributing to the Female Tatler under the pseudonyms of Artesia and Lucinda.[8] Whether this was then known to the readers of *The Virgin Unmask'd* is very difficult to ascertain, but Mandeville shows in this first fictional dialogue how much he enjoys hiding behind male or female characters to disconcert the reader. Apart from Lucinda, Artesia, and Antonia, Mandeville expresses his views through other, more discreet, female characters such as the grave Polytheca, grieved by the death of her children and afflicted with a selfish husband, or Fulvia, who only appears in the first dialogue of the second part of *The Fable of the Bees*, and who Mandeville suspiciously presents as so "inconsiderable" that "it would be impertinent to trouble the Reader with a character of her" (MANDEVILLE, 1924, p. 19).Two years after *The Virgin Unmask'd*, in the preface of his only medical work published in English – *A Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Passions*, a dialogue between Philopirio, a physician, and two of his patients, Misomedon and his wife Polytheca –, Mandeville reveals that he speaks with Philopirio's voice:

> In these Dialogues, I have done the same as Seneca did in his Octavia, and brought my self upon the Stage; with this difference, that he kept his own Name, and I changed mine for that of Philopirio, a Lover of Experience, which I shall always profess to be: Wheretofore I desire my Reader to take whatever is spoken by the person I named last, as said by my self; which I entreat him not to do with the Part of Misomedon, whom the better to illustrate his Distemper, I have made guilty of some extravagant Sallies, that in strictness I would not be accountable for. (MANDEVILLE, 2017, p. 22)

[7] See Mandeville (1709, p. 148).

[8] For more on Mandeville's contributions in *The Female Tatler*, see Anderson (1936), Branchi (2021) and more particularly Goldsmith (1999).

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By his allusion to Seneca and his tragedy, Mandeville is not merely giving readers information about his auctorial participation in the dialogues; he is also insisting on their theatrical nature. In the second part of the *Fable of the Bees*, the dialogues are presented as performances in their own right, displaying all the conventional features of the genre:

> But tho' the Names I have chosen are feign'd, and the Circumstances of the Persons fictitious, the Characters themselves are real, and as faithfully copied from Nature, as I have been able to take them. I have known Criticks find fault in Play-wrights for annexing short Characters to the Names they gave the Persons of the Drama; alledging, that it is forestalling their Pleasure, and that whatever the Actors are represented to be, they want no Monitor, and are wise enough to find it out themselves. (MANDEVILLE, 1924, II, p. 10)

The author of *The Fable of the Bees* takes up a literary motif which Robert Burton had already used as the opening of his own address to the reader in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, "Democritus Junior to the Reader": "Gentle reader, I presume thou wilst bee very Inquisitive to know what personate Actor this is, that so insolently intrudes upon this common Theater, to the Worlds view, arrogating another mans name, whence hee is, why he doth it, and what he hath to say?" (BURTON, 1624, p. 1). By insisting on presenting his dialogues as plays,[9] Mandeville is once again setting a trap for his readers: are they "wise enough" to find which of the characters on stage speaks for the author, and should they even try to find out, or should they instead draw their own conclusions from what is being said, regardless of the locutor's identity? While provocatively suggesting that his readers are not "wise enough" and should indeed be given "some account of the Persons, that are to entertain" them (MANDEVILLE, 1924, II, p. 10), Mandeville answers the question of his presence

[9]In the "Essay on Charity and Charity Schools", Mandeville apologises to the reader "for the tiresome Dance I am going to lead him in if he intends to follow me," underlining once again the fact that his works are intended as elaborate masques (MANDEVILLE, 1924, I, p. 277). He once again takes up the idea of the text as a performance in the preface of his *Enquiry into the Causes of the Frequent Executions at Tyburn*: "I am not so vain as to place any Merit in the Performance, or promise myself the Applause of many: on the contrary, I expect to be censur'd, and perhaps deservedly, for the uncouth Decorations I have intermix'd with my subject." (MANDEVILLE, 1725, np.)

onstage in a rather ambiguous way: "As it is supposed, that Cleomenes[10] is my Friend, and speaks my Sentiments, so it is but Justice, that every Thing which he advances should be look'd upon and consider'd as my own; but no Man in his Senses would think, that I ought to be equally responsible for every Thing that Horatio says, who is his Antagonist." (MANDEVILLE, 1924, II, p. 21) That he might appear on stage as Cleomenes is here presented as a mere supposition, while the idea that Mandeville could be hiding behind Horatio is casually dismissed in a way that implies that he could still be responsible for at least some of Horatio's remarks.[11]

"Wild or gentle Reader"

Mandeville thus appears under multiple fictitious identities in his works in order to force his readers to question the authority and reliability of these intermediaries, but also the validity of the arguments developed in the texts and peritexts. The reader, however, is not entirely left outside the textual boundaries of the discussion and his role is not strictly limited to that of a mere spectator.

If for Jonathan Swift, "readers may be divided into three Classes, the *Superficial*, the *Ignorant*, and the *Learned*" (SWIFT, 1704, p. 189) – the last being the only class of readers he confesses to be writing for –, Mandeville claims to cater for "every reader" (MANDEVILLE, 2017, *Free Thoughts*, p. 2) and cultivates a closeness expressed by the frequent use of the possessive adjective "my": "my reader". In *A Letter to Dion*[12] Mandeville mobilises his readers against his critic: "I fancy, that most of my Readers besides, will be of opinion. . . ", opposing them to "other readers" or to "their readers", that is to say the readers of "News-Writers" and "Polemick Authors" (MANDEVILLE, 1732, p. 66, 45, 8). In *A Modest defence of Publick Stews*, this feeling of togetherness is expressed in a way that seems to underline an almost natural proximity between the ideas ex-

[10]The choice of names – Cleomenes and Horatio – adds to the obvious theatricality of the dialogues. Both names would no doubt have been familiar to eighteenth-century theatre-going readers, encouraging them to think of Mandeville's dialogues as plays and to identify their dramatic conventions. Cleomenes is the eponymous character of Dryden's tragedy *Cleomenes, the Spartan Heroe* (represented at the Theatre Royal in 1692 and published by Jacob Tonson that same year); he is also, with Dion, a courtier in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*. Horatio is of course a character from Shakespeare's *Tragedy of Hamlet*, published by Wellington in 1703 (while he was also publishing Mandeville's first two works), and also published, with other Shakespeare plays, by Jacob Tonson in 1709 (Mandeville's publisher for the third, enlarged edition of the *Fable of the Bees* and all subsequent versions, including part II).

[11]F. B. Kaye has identified passages in the second part of the *Fable of the Bees* in which Mandeville speaks unquestionably with Horatio's voice. See Mandeville (1924, II, p. 21-2, n. 2).

[12]Mandeville's reply to Bishop Berkeley's criticism of the "Essay on Charity and Charity Schools".

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pressed by the anonymous author and their presumed reception by the reader: "To conclude, when *my Arguments* are impartially examin'd, I doubt not but *my Readers* will join with me." (MANDEVILLE, 1724, Preface, np., emphasis mine). By doing so, Mandeville suggests the existence of an exclusive circle of readers, who are not so much to be identified by one quality or another (superficial, ignorant, learned) as by the simple fact that they are reading his works. Although Mandeville may be writing for a particular class of readers – "Those I had in view for my readers" (MANDEVILLE, 2017, *Treatise*, p. 21) – they seem to form a rather heterogenous crowd.

While the author resorts to female personae and often includes female characters in his dialogues, it is difficult to say whether female readers were specifically targeted or not, even in such texts as *The Virgin Unmask'd* or the third dialogue of the *Treatise*, as Mandeville also intended to make his male readers reflect upon the female condition. In the preface to *The Virgin Unmask'd*, he claims that his "Design through the whole, is to let young ladies know whatever is dreadful in Marriage" (MANDEVILLE, 1724, *Preface*, np.), but this does not mean that women are here the sole readers he has in mind. Whether they are men or women, those he describes as "my reader" are only distinguished by their varying attitudes and behaviours. Much like any other author addressing his readers and wishing to secure their favours, Mandeville resorts to unsurprisingly flattering adjectives. His readers are "wild or gentle" (MANDEVILLE, 1704, preface, np.), "judicious," "knowing and candid"[13] (MANDEVILLE, 1924, II, p. 28 and 15), "learned" (MANDEVILLE, 2017, *Treatise*, p. 28), "well-meaning" (MANDEVILLE, 1924, I, p. 229), "good" (MANDEVILLE, 1703, Preface, np.), "indulgent" (MANDEVILLE, 1732, p. 19) or even "as calm as myself" (MANDEVILLE, 2017, *Free Thought*, p. 143). Readers, however, even Mandeville's, are not without blemish. They can be "too scrupulous" (MANDEVILLE, 1924, I, p. 57), "inquisitive" (MANDEVILLE, 1724, Preface, np.), "impatient" (MANDEVILLE, 2017, *Treatise*, p. 26), or even worse, and turn at times against the author himself: "All this an hasty and inconsiderate Reader will call Folly, and tell me, that I am fighting with my own shadow." (MANDEVILLE, 1732, p. 19).

[13]The adjective "candid" is repeatedly used by Mandeville to qualify his readers, but the meaning of the word expresses the ambivalence of their relationship as it describes both a pure and innocent individual (who could easily be deceived and misled), or someone who is impartial and favourably disposed, or even sincere in his reactions and judgements. Mandeville's readers thus have to decide how they imagine the author sees them: as gullible fools or as sincere and knowledgeable partners. "Knowing and candid" may thus seem somewhat contradictory.

Endowed with moral qualities or defects, Mandeville's readers are literary characters in their own right, the author's creation. Much like him, they are also embodied by the various characters that are either actively involved in the dialogues or appear in the portraits delineated in various secondary narratives. The most obvious example is that of Misomedon, in the *Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterick Diseases*. Mandeville encourages potential hypochondriac readers to identify with Philopirio's patient in a treatise that, he claims, has been written especially for them. Mandeville's hypochondriac, much like Burton's melancholic, also happens to be a compulsive reader: "*Misomedon* is represented as an Admirer of polite Literature, and having been a Lover of Reading from his Youth, so I thought it not unnatural, that such a Man, upon the least turn of his Head, might become over-fond of *Latin* Proverbs, and fuller in his discourse of Quotations from the Classicks, than a Man of Sense." (MANDEVILLE, 2017, *Treatise*, p. 28) But, more generally, Mandeville's male and female readers can recognise themselves in many of the characters created by the author: the unhappy couple of the *Treatise*, Misomedon and Polytheca; the "maiden Lady and her niece" in the *Virgin Unmask'd*, or Aurelia and Dorante, whose sad story is discussed in the same book by Lucinda and Antonia; Emilia, the former prostitute; Horatio, the unfaithful husband or Crato, the rich miser, whose lives are delineated in *Free Thoughts on Religion*; Horatio or Fulvia in the second part of *The Fable of the Bees*, or in the portrait of an unnamed gentleman drawn by Cleomenes in the second dialogue of Part II of the Fable, and which Horatio dismisses as "the *caricatura* of a Gentleman":

> As he is a Man of Erudition himself, so he is a Promoter of Arts and Sciences; he is a Friend to Merit, a Rewarder of Industry, and a profess'd Enemy to nothing but Immorality and Oppression. Tho' no Man's Table is better furnish'd, nor Cellars better stored; he is temperate in his Eating, and never commits excess in Drinking: Tho' he has an exquisite Palate, he always prefers wholesome Meats to those that are delicious only, and never indulges his Appetite in any thing that might probably be prejudicial to his Health. (MANDEVILLE, 1924, II, p. 69)

But whoever the readers are, or identify with, their condition is not exactly that of their fictional doubles, that is to say that of *bona fide* interlocutors in a dialogue – like Horatio for example, who is made to contradict or interrupt Cleomenes. Readers may have the illusion of participating in a dialogue because

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they agree or identify with one character or the other, but they are in reality mute and passive spectators. They have no voice, or rather they have too many. Readers, however, are not entirely powerless: their power certainly lies in their ability to try and extract meaning from what they read, but it more actively lies in their ability to stop reading and close the book.

The ingenious author[14] and the judicious reader

Mandeville, as any author, is well aware of the fact that a disconcerted reader or worse, a disgruntled one, can easily stop reading and put away the book: "Some people open a Book anywhere, and having read a few Lines, throw it by" (MANDEVILLE, 1709, Preface, np.). That same year – 1709 – in his *Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour*, Shaftesbury also witnessed the emergence of a variety of readers rendered all the more audacious and unmannerly by auctorial attempts to establish more informal literary interactions: "'Tis not to be imagin'd what advantage the Reader has, when he can thus cope with his Author, who is willing to come on a fair Stage with him, and exchange the Tragick Buskin for an easier and more natural Gate and Habit." (p. 48) Securing the readers' attention while keeping him under his control is therefore an essential task for the writer, whether or not he wishes the readers to endorse his views.

Apologising for an unduly long digression on eating flesh, Mandeville begs his readers to read fast or to skip the whole passage: "I have gone too much out of my way already, and shall therefore beg the Reader, if he would have any more of this, to run over the following Fable, or else, if he be tired, to let it alone, with the assurance than in doing of either he shall equally oblige me." (MANDEVILLE, 1924, I, p. 175). In a very Sternian vein, Mandeville's self-conscious narrative incarnation, indulges in a digressive mode for which he offers feigned apologies: "I beg pardon for this Start out of my way, and desire the experienced Reader duly to weigh what has been said as to the main Purpose." (MANDEVILLE, 1924, I, p. 228). He does so again at the beginning of Remark E of *The Fable of the Bees*, advising the reader "to skip this Remark, unless he be in perfect good Humour, and has nothing at all to do" (MANDEVILLE, 1924, I, p. 82). The function of those disingenuous apologies is to secure the reader's attention while providing some sort of light-hearted in-

[14]George Blewitt speaks ironically of Mandeville as an "ingenious author" who "has such a way with him, that it is very hard to know, when he is in earnest and when not." (BLEWITT, 1725, p. 160).

terlude in the dense development of the essays and remarks appended to the *Grumbling Hive*.

Another way of keeping the reader alert by provinding necessary pauses in a discussion, at least in the second part of *The Fable of the Bees* and in the *Treatise*, is to plant a variety of props in the dialogues – objects that are never properly described but pop up in the conversation, generally after a long and difficult passage, and compel the reader to stop reading and to form a mental image of them. They provide a form of ekphrastic pause in the sequence of arguments and counter-arguments.[15] Mandeville thus introduces a painted portrait noticed by Philopirio in Misomedon's parlour – "I saw in your Parlour a Head of *Van Dike*'s, which I would swear to, is an Original" (MANDEVILLE, 2017, *Treatise*, p. 63) –, or two Dutch nativities compared and commented upon by Cleomenes, Horatio, and Fulvia (MANDEVILLE, 1924, II, pp. 32-4). In *The Virgin Unmask'd*, it is a modest handkerchief handed to Antonia by her aunt and which, opening the book itself *in medias res*, is meant to produce a striking (and as misleading as the title itself) image in the male reader's imagination – "Here niece, take my handkerchief, prithee now, if you find nothing else to cover your nakedness" (MANDEVILLE, 1709, p. 1). Among those objects are also books, like the numerous ones taken from bookshelves by the characters and read aloud by Misomedon and Philopirio, or by Cleomenes and Horatio: "It is just behind you: third Shelf from the Bottom; the first Volume; pray reach it for me; it is worth your hearing. — It is in his Essay on Government. Here it is."[16] (MANDEVILLE, 1924, II, p. 192). They are also books exchanged by the characters, like the precious copy of the *Fable of the Bees* handed by Cleomenes to a rather unenthusiastic Horatio – "Yield something to our Friendship, and condescend for once to read *The Fable of the Bees* for my Sake: It's a handsome Volume: you love Books: I have one extremely well bound; do; let me; suffer me to make you a Present of it." (MANDEVILLE, 1924, II, p. 57). In the last example, Horatio unmistakably stands for the hesitant reader, who is likely to have formed a negative opinion of *The Fable of the Bees* without having really read it.

To strengthen the relation first established with his readers by apostrophising them, Mandeville also resorts to a range of rhetorical devices meant to induce

[15]Those props also contribute to comedic quality of Mandeville's dialogues.

[16]The book Cleomenes is asking Horatio to take from the shelf is Temple's *Essay upon the Original Nature of Government* (1680).

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an emotional response rather than a rational one. Claude J. Rawson points to an "aggressiveness towards the reader" that "chiefly distinguishes Swift from the later writers to whom he can be compared" (RAWSON, 1973, p. 6). Whether or not Rawson would include Mandeville among those "who imitate him or are prefigured in his work" (*Ibid.*), the author of the *Fable of the Bees* obviously chose another mode of interaction with his readership: his readers can be humorously coaxed or disoriented, but never cruelly humiliated. In *A Modest Defence*, Mandeville tries to put his readers on his side with a playful quip at the expense of the "experience'd reader" (in that case, not a reader expert at reading books): "and how far this Fancy to Woman may be cool'd by a stinging *Gonorrhea*, I leave the experience'd reader to judge." (MANDEVILLE, 1724, p. 21). But most of the time, appearing to be anticipating criticism is one way, if not of averting it, at least of minimising its impact. Mandeville opposes "his" reader (in the singular), to the indistinct mass of the readers (in the plural) who may find fault with his line of thoughts: "I don't question some of my Readers will have already taken prejudice against me," claims Mandeville in the preface of his *Treatise*, "those impatient ones" who could condemn him too quickly as an "enemy of reason." He further adds, "some people, I know, will not be pleased with what I said in the 39^{th}, and some of the following pages," (MANDEVILLE, 2017, *Treatise*, p. 26) thus compelling the reluctant readers to read at least thus far out of sheer curiosity. He also preventively discourages potential criticism by playing on the reader's sense of pride, deflecting possible accusations of atheism in *Free Thoughts on Religion* – "No *candid reader* can imagine, that I would endeavour to make slight of Faith, or lessen the Reverence which is due to the Real mystery of our Religion" (MANDEVILLE, 2017, p. 83, emphasis mine) –, or reassuring his British readers whose national pride might be piqued by a passage from his *Treatise*: "I hope no *candid Reader* will suspect from it, that I design peculiarly to reflect upon any Town or Country more than another, much less to point at particular Persons" (MANDEVILLE, 2017, *Treatise*, p. 26, emphasis mine).

More often than not, however, Mandeville's attitude towards the reader may seem suspiciously deferential: "I *must desire* my Reader to look back on what has been said page 18 and 19" (MANDEVILLE, 2017, *Free Thoughts*, p. 126), "I *beg* my serious Reader, that he would for a while abate a little of his gravity" (MANDEVILLE, 1924, I, p. 350, emphasis mine). His appeals to the reader's impartial judgement – "I leave the Reader to judge" (MANDEVILLE, 2017, *Free Thoughts*, p. 236) – are also too frequent not to appear tinged with some measure of irony. If Mandeville professes to trust the reader's opinion, he is in

fact convinced that most of the time the "well-meaning reader" is an ill-judging one, and that he has to clarify his line of thought so that "no Reader for the future may misconstrue me" (MANDEVILLE, 1924, I, p. 248), knowing that they inevitably will. Mandeville's readers are presented with another paradox: encouraged to think by themselves, they are consistently reminded of their failure to do so and asked to think again, without being given clear directions. Much like Misomedon, the compulsive and confused reader of the *Treatise*, the reader of *Free Thoughts on Religion* is not told to stop reading, but encouraged to make his reading more fruitful: "By this time, I hope I have convinc'd my Reader, that we ought not to believe what different sects say against one another *without proof*" (MANDEVILLE, 2017, *Free Thoughts*, p. 123, emphasis mine). Further down, in a chapter on "the Reciprocal Duties between the Clergy and the Laity," Mandeville goes back to the same idea and justifies the paradoxical nature of his works: "I must put the Reader in mind, that to judge impartially, we ought to be acquainted with the wrong side of things as well as the right, and that all Men ought to be consider'd two different ways." (MANDEVILLE, 2017, *Free Thoughts*, p. 145).

Much has been written on Mandeville's Fable of the Bees and whether or not it could be counted as an example of Menippean satire.[17] What Rabéa Aniq-Filali writes about this particular literary tradition – with clear Bakhtinian undertones[18] – sheds some light on Mandeville's writings in general and on what his formal choices imply for the reader: "[The Menippean satire] sought to develop the people's awareness and critical faculties. To this end, it created a chaotic world, putting readers out of focus, obliging them to consider the various aspects of things before making a choice. The self-conscious narrator was then used to carry out this mission." (ANIQ-FILALI, 1991, p. 444). By refusing – or seemingly refusing – to take sides, Mandeville leaves the reader alone with his own prejudices and wavering opinions, an uncomfortable position which is perfectly summed up by a discomposed Horatio (a fictional reader of *The Fable of the Bees*) in the second dialogue: "This is more unintelligible than any thing you have said yet; Why will you heap Difficulties upon one another, without solving any? I desire you would clear up this last Paradox, before you do any thing else." (MANDEVILLE, 1924, II, p. 78). Describing the "perplexing effects" of Mandeville's writing on the reader (including the modern reader) Uphaus explains that "to understand and appreciate the per-

[17] On this subject, see for example HIND (1968).
[18] See chapter 4, "Characteristic of genre and plot composition in Dostoevsky's works," in Bakhtin (1984).

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plexing effects of Mandeville's vision requires, therefore, the reader's frequent revision and abandonment of prejudices and preconceptions, including our assumption of formal or aesthetic coherence of literary texts" (UPHAUS, 1979, p. 28). What Mandeville puts into systematic practice is the principle of indeterminacy described by Wolfgang Iser: "When the reader has gone through the various perspectives offered him by the text, he is left with nothing but his own experience to judge what has been communicated to him [...] The act of reading is therefore a process of seeking to pin down the oscillating structure of the text to some specific meaning" (ISER, 1971, p. 6-7). For Iser, indeterminacy sometimes inflicts an "almost intolerable" strain on the reader (ISER, 1971, p. 6). This is certainly true of Mandeville's readers, although Mandeville shows no intention of satisfying their "desire for consistency" (ISER, 1971, p. 40). While they seem to be constantly chaperoned by the author and his fictional incarnations, they are in fact left very much to their own devices and have to struggle alone against a humourous but ever-paradoxical text: "I am afraid that by this time I have given many of my Readers a real Displeasure, by dwelling so long upon the Reality of Pleasure; but I can't help it." (MANDEVILLE, 1924, I, p. 161).

If – despite his denying it – Mandeville does not really intend to convince the reader to adopt a particular point of view or set of ideas, what is the reader to gain from reading his prose? What happens to Misomedon in the *Treatise* provides us with an answer. At the end of the third dialogue, Philopirio reveals to his patient that he will never be cured, but that he now has effective tools to control his chronic disease. I have argued elsewhere that what Misomedon has gained from his conversation with Philopirio is a reading method and a sense of the value of critical thinking and self-knowledge.[19] One of the signs of this newly-gained semi-autonomy is the patient's ability to pick out the hackneyed metaphors used by the physician to test his resistance to the empty flourishes of the defective medical compendiums he was so addicted to. The same can be said of Mandeville's readers in general, and Uphaus is right to stress the importance of the opening sentence of the *Fable of the Bees*, which encapsulates Mandeville's writing ethos: "One of the great reasons why so few people understand themselves, is that most writers are always teaching men what they should be, and hardly ever trouble their heads with telling them what they are"

[19] See Kleiman-Lafon (2016).

(MANDEVILLE, 1924, I, p. 39).[20]

Mandeville does not provide his readers with definitive ideas or ready-made moral principles, but with a guide-book the very form of which yields the keys to critical thinking and self-knowledge. Much like Misomedon, who eventually becomes a (slightly) better reader of books and of himself, Horatio is also gradually learning how to read his own soul by reading *The Fable of the Bees*. The following fragments of conversation between Cleomenes and Horatio hint at the fact that becoming a good reader is a slow and tortuous process, and probably a never-ending one:

> *Hor*. I don't remember, I ever look'd into myself so much as I have done since last Night after I left you." (MANDEVILLE, 1924, II, p. 62).

> *Cleo*. You have now a very fine Opportunity, *Horatio*, of looking into your Heart, and, with a little of my Assistance, examining yourself. If you can condescend to this, I promise you, that you shall make great Discoveries, and be convinc'd of Truths you are now unwilling to believe. (II, p. 84–5)

> *Cleo*. Don't banter me, *Horatio*; I don't pretend to instruct a Man of your Knowledge; but if you will take my Advice, search into yourself with Care and Boldness, and at your Leisure peruse the Book I recommended. (II, p. 99)

> *Cleo*: I thought you was resolv'd to be better acquainted with yourself, and to search into your Heart with Care and Boldness.

> *Hor*. That's a cruel Thing; I tried it three times since I saw you last, till it put me into a Sweat, and then I was forced to leave off.

> *Cleo*: You should try again, and use yourself by Degrees to think abstractly, and then the Book [*The Fable of the Bees*] will be a great Help

[20] Kaye has underlined Mandeville's Machiavellian inspiration here (see MANDEVILLE, 1924, I, p. 39n1): "But having the intention to write something useful to anyone who understands, it seems to me better to concentrate on what really happens rather than on theories or speculations" (MACHIAVELLI, 2019, §XV, p. 53).

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to you. (II, p. 107–8)

Mandeville's reader, much like the incurable hypochondriac, will probably never be "judicious." Drifting along the winding roads to self-improvement, he is bound to relapse, but reading books – or perhaps reading "the Book"[21] – is supposed to put him back on tracks. Readers, however, may wonder if Mandeville's relentless irony and ever elusive meaning is a medicine worth taking. Shaftesbury, who pretended to be a medical student while in Rotterdam (Mandeville's birthplace), at the end of the seventeenth century, describes readers as patients undergoing a cure that could have been prescribed by Bernard Mandeville, M.D., himself:[22] "We hope also that our *Patient* (for such we naturally suppose our *Reader*) will consider duly with himself, that what he endures in this Operation is for no inconsiderable End: since 'tis to gain him a *Will*, and insure him a *certain Resolution*; by which he shall know where to find himself; be sure of his own Meaning and Design." (SHAFTESBURY, 1710, p. 35) This sentence, full of promise for the valetudinary reader finds a much less optimistic echo in Richard Rodino's article on what he calls the "vexatious experience" of Swift's readers. For Rodino, the reader has no hope to ever be sure of either meaning or design, and the prescription – the ironic and paradoxical text – is actually meant to be ineffectual: "The process of reading may involve progressive release from the confinement of uncertainty, or it may open unsuspected floodgates of doubt in a pampered reader. Sometimes the satirical pill, even if not sugar-coated, is readily acceptable as medicine, but at other times reading does not seem much like healing at all. At least the abstraction of a "Good Physician" behind the work emerges only when the primary reading experience itself has been forgotten.[23]" (RODINO, 1982, p. 325)

At the end of the *Treatise*, Philopirio tells Misomedon that he no longer needs his constant care and the patient humourously replies that he has managed at last to cure him of his constant craving for medical advice. At the end of their short final exchange in Latin (for which Mandeville provided an English translation in the 1730 edition), Philopirio assures Misomedon that "with the Blessing of God and your own Endeavours, you'll be well and lusty in a little Time.[24]" (MANDEVILLE, 2017, p. 185) Much like Misomedon, more or less

[21] Mandeville humorously refers to *Fable of the Bees* as "the Book," endowing it with a provocatively biblical aura.
[22] He does so in a book incidentally printed for John Morphew, who had published *The Virgin Unmask'd* the year before.
[23] The « Good Physician » is an image used by Fish (1972) to characterise the author.
[24] "*et si faveant conatibus superi, neque ipse tibi desis, propediem pancratice valebis*."

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abandoned at the end of the *Treatise* by the one he had identified as the "good physician," Mandeville's readers are also left alone with their book as the author disappears in a flicker, leaving most, if not all questions unanswered: "And so, fare ye well Reader" (MANDEVILLE, 1703, preface, np.).

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